

## Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 036234

FOLLOWING REPEAT RANGOON 0495 ACTION SECSTATE INFO BANGKOK  
CHIANG MAI 12 FEB

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 0495

BANGKOK ALSO FOR DEA

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SNAR, BM

SUBJECT: THE NARCOTICS CONTROL PROGRAM IN BURMA; AN ASSESSMENT

SUMMARY: GUB NARCOTICS CONTROL EFFORTS HAVE BEEN STEPPED UP SHARPLY IN LAST 18 MONTHS WITH A TWO-PRONGED STRATEGY: MILITARY INTERDICTION OF CARAVANS AND DESTRUCTION OF REFINERIES; AND MORE RECENTLY, DESTRUCTION OF POPPY FIELDS USING POLICE AND CIVILIANS. USG BILATERAL ASSISTANCE (HELICOPTERS, F-27, COMMUNICATIONS AND OTHER EQUIPMENT) IS COMPATIBLE WITH THESE STRATEGIES BUT DELIVERIES SHOULD BE SPEEDED UP TO MEET THE SEASONAL PEAK IN ANTI-NARCOTICS OPERATIONS. BURMESE EFFORTS HAVE BEEN RELATIVELY EFFECTIVE DESPITE SECURITY AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. THEY TAKE PROGRAM SERIOUSLY AND HAVE PROVIDED US ADEQUATE INFORMATION, MUCH OF WHICH WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO VERIFY INDEPENDENTLY, ABOUT THEIR EFFORTS AND THE USE OF THE US-SUPPLIED EQUIPMENT. WE SHOULD: CONTINUE PROGRAM AS CURRENTLY PLANNED, IF POSSIBLE ACCELERATING DELIVERIES OF EQUIP-  
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MENT; GIVE ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATION TO MULTISPECTRAL PHOTOGRAPHY; NUTURE THE INCREASING DEA/GUB CONTACTS; AND REVIEW WITH THE BURMESE FROM TIME TO TIME STRATEGY AND PROGRESS. HOWEVER, WE SHOULD BEAR IN MIND THAT THIS IS ESSENTIALLY A BURMESFQL NOT A US PROGRAM,

AND ITS SUCCESS WILL DEPEND ON THEIR OWN EFFORTS PROMPTED BY THEIR OWN INTERESTS. END SUMMARY.

1. THE FOLLOWING IS A MISSION ASSESSMENT OF NARCOTICS CONTROL CAMPAIGN IN BURMA AT THE BEGINNING OF 1976, ITS PROBABLE FUTURE COURSE FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE YEAR AND THE ROLE OF THE US THEREIN.

2. BACKGROUND - THE BURMESE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN ENGAGED IN ANTI-NARCOTICS ACTIVITIES FOR MANY YEARS BOTH BECAUSE THE TRAFFIC OF OPIUM AND REFINED PRODUCTS HAS BEEN AN IMPORTANT SOURCE OF FUNDS FOR THE VARIOUS INSURGENCIES OPERATING IN EASTERN BURMA AND, MORE RECENTLY, ACCORDING TO SOME ACCOUNTS BECAUSE OF AN INCREASINGLY SERIOUS DOMESTIC NARCOTICS PROBLEM EMERGING AMONG THE CHILDREN OF THE URBAN ELITE. THE EFFORTS HAVE BEEN STEPPED UP IN THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS, TO SOME DEGREE AT LEAST, BECAUSE OF GROWING INTERNATIONAL CONCERN ABOUT ILLICIT NARCOTICS AND THE KEY ROLE OF BURMA IN ITS PRODUCTION. IN 1974, THE GUB PASSED A TOUGH NARCOTICS LAW DESIGNED TO RESTRICT DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL TRAFFIC AND USE OF NARCOTICS; IT IS BEING SERIOUSLY ENFORCED. IN THE SAME YEAR, THE GUB DEPARTED SOMEWHAT FROM ITS TRADITIONAL "GO IT ALONE" POSTURE BY AGREEING TO A BILATERAL PROGRAM WITH THE US UNDER WHICH HELICOPTERS AND RELATED EQUIPMENT WOULD BE PROVIDED THE GUB IN SUPPORT OF ITS ANTI-NARCOTICS EFFORTS. THE PROGRAM WAS GIVEN FURTHER IMPETUS BY THE VISIT TO THE US OF NARCOTICS TOURS OF VARIOUS SENIOR GUB MILITARY/POLICE OFFICIALS CONCERNED WITH THE PROGRAM AND BY THE VISIT TO RANGOON OF AMBASSADOR VANCE TO MAP OUT FUTURE US COOPERATION WITH THE GUB. TO DATE, SIX HELICOPTERS HAVE BEEN DELIVERED, SIX MORE ARE ON ORDER AND AN F-27 AIRCRAFT FOR USE AS COMMAND AND CONTROL CENTER WILL BE DELIVERED IN A MONTH.

3. GUB STRATEGY - OUR CONTACTS WITH BURMESE AUTHORITIES DIRECTING ANTI-NARCOTICS EFFORTS (SUCH AS DURING THE VERY USEFUL RECENT CONSULTATION BETWEEN GUB AND DEA HERE), LEAD US TO BELIEVE THAT BURMESE ARE DEVELOPING A COHERENT TWO-COURSE STRATEGY FOR DEALING WITH THE QUESTION OF ILLEGAL POPPY CULTIVATION AND TRAFFIC OF NARCOTICS. INITIALLY, THE GUB STRATEGY WAS PREDOMINANTLY MILITARY; CONFIDENTIAL

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IT FOCUSED ON INTERDICTION OF OPIUM CARAVANS AND THE DESTRUCTION OF REFINERIES AND BASES; LAST OCTOBER'S RAID ON PAN PI, IN WHICH THE US SUPPLIED HELICOPTERS PLAYED A PART, IS A GOOD EXAMPLE. MORE RECENTLY, HOWEVER, THE BURMESE ARE ALSO MOUNTING A CAMPAIGN TO DESTROY THE POPPY FIELDS BEFORE HARVEST, INITIALLY IN THOSE AREAS OF THE COUNTRY UNDER CENTRAL GOVERNMENT CONTROL. IN THIS THEY ARE USING THE NATIONAL CIVILIAN POLITICAL STRUCTURE DOWN TO THE VILLAGE AND TOWNSHIP COUNCIL LEVEL, THE BSPP MACHINERY, AND THE POLICE. THE DECEMBER-JANUARY CHIN HILL AND EASTERN SHAN STATE OPERATIONS IN WHICH OVER 2,000 ACRES OF POPPY HAVE THUSFAR BEEN DESTROYED REPRESENTS THIS APPROACH; IT HAS INVOLVED AN UNUSUALLY EXTENSIVE PUBLICITY AND HIGH LEVEL TRAVEL CAMPAIGN DESIGNED TO PROMOTE A POPULAR MOVEMENT AGAINST OPIUM CULTIVATION. IN THE

LONGER TERM, THE BURMESE HOPE TO EXPAND THIS ASPECT OF THE ANTI-NARCOTICS PROGRAM, BRINGING IN THE UNFDAC ASSISTANCE TO PROMOTE CROP SUBSTITUTION. THE READILY ADMIT, HOWEVER, THAT THE SIGNIFICANT CURTAILMENT OF OPIUM CULTIVATION IS A LONG TERM PROJECT, PERHAPS FIVE TO TEN YEARS. (REALISTICALLY, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT IT CAN BE TOTALLY HALTED IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE FOR SOCIAL, GEOGRAPHIC AND OTHER REASONS, BUT OUR INTEREST PRINCIPALLY IS IN THE SURPLUS OPIUM AVAILABLE FOR EXPORT). CONSIDERATION IS ALSO BEING GIVEN TO DESTRUCTION OF FIELDS BY SPRAYING WITH HERBICIDES ALTHOUGH THERE EVIDENTLY IS SOME CONCERN WITHIN THE GUB AS THIS APPROACH MAY DESTROY FOOD CROPS AS WELL AND LEAVE THE GUB OPEN TO CHARGES (BY THE BCP AND OTHERS) THAT THEY ARE STARVING THE PEASANTRY.

4. THE ROLE OF THE US PROGRAM - AS CURRENTLY ENVISAGED, THE US PROGRAM SUPPORTS THESE STRATEGIES. THE HELICOPTERS HAVE ALREADY PROVED USEFUL IN BOTH THE INTERDICTION APPROACH (FOR LOGISTICAL SUPPORT OF THE TROOPS) AND IN THE DESTRUCTION OF POPPY FIELDS (FOR RECONNAISSANCE AND TRANSPORT OF PERSONNEL). THE TWENTY BACK-PACK TRANSCEIVERS WILL EVIDENTLY BE USED BY THE GROUND PATROLS ENGAGED IN THE INTERDICTION OF CARAVANS AND THE LOCATION AND DESTRUCTION OF REFINERIES. THE NIGHT VISION DEVICES WOULD BE USED IN THIS SAME EFFORT. THE F-27 AND UHF/VHF BASE STATIONS WILL LINK THE TOP MILITARY COMMAND, THE PATROLS, AND THE HELICOPTERS TOGETHER IN FIELD OPERATIONS. (THE APPROACH OF THE FEBRUARY-MAY PEAK SEASON UNDERSCORES THE IMPORTANCE OF TIMELY DELIVERY OF THIS EQUIPMENT). AND THE MULTISPECTRAL PHOTOGRAPHY (MSP), SHOULD IT PROVE FEASIBLE, WOULD BE USED TO IDENTIFY POPPY FIELDS FOR SUBSEQUENT

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DESTRUCTION ON THE GROUND.

5. OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS - THE ULTIMATE TEST OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE BURMESE EFFORT AND THE US SUPPORT THEREOF WOULD BE IN A SIGNIFICANT REDUCTION IN THE QUANTITY OF NARCOTICS REACHING THE THAI BORDER BUT AS YET THIS IS DIFFICULT TO DEMONSTRATE; RELIABLE OVER-ALL DATA ON THE QUANTITY OF THESE GOODS WHICH CROSS THE BORDER IS NOT READILY AVAILABLE. NONETHELESS, WE KNOW THAT THE TRAFFICKERS IN RECENT MONTHS HAVE HAD MORE DIFFICULTY THAN EVER BEFORE IN PLAYING THEIR TRADITIONAL TRADE. A NUMBER OF CARAVANS HAVE BEEN BLOCKED OR TURNED BACK AND SOME DESTROYED BY THE BURMA ARMY WHICH, AT THE SAME TIME, REMAINS ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN COMBAT WITH THE BCP. WE BELIEVE THE BURMESE ARE SERIOUS ABOUT THE PROGRAM, HAPPILY FOR THEIR OWN SECURITY REASONS RATHER THAN FOR MORE IDEALISTIC BUT LESS DURABLE MOTIVES. THEY POINT OUT THAT THEIR EFFORT ENTAILS SACRIFICES ON THEIR PART, INCLUDING THE LIVES OF SOME OF THEIR TROOPS. WE THINK THEIR STRATEGY IS SIMPLE BUT SOUND. IT WILL, OF COURSE, BE LIMITED IN IMPLEMENTATION BY SECURITY CONDITIONS (NO READY ACCESS TO THE EXTENSIVE POPPY GROWING AREAS UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE BCP, FOR INSTANCE) AND MORE GENERALLY BY THE DETERIORATING ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN BURMA WHICH REDUCE THE RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR THIS OR ANY OTHER TASK. RELATED

TO THE LATTER POINT, WE CANNOT IGNORE THE POSSIBILITY THAT GROWING CORRUPTION WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT, PROMPTED BY SLIPPING LIVING STANDARDS, ALSO MAY ADVERSELY AFFECT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAM, ESPECIALLY AT THE LOWER LEVELS. HOWEVER, THIS PROBLEM HAS YET TO BECOME A MAJOR ONE AND THE GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP WILL NOT TOLERATE SUCH ACTIVITY WHEN UNCOVERED. (IN FACT, THERE HAVE BEEN REPORTS THAT NE WIN STRONGLY OPPOSES NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING IN PART BECAUSE OF HIS CONCERN ABOUT ITS POTENTIALLY CORROSIVE EFFECTS ON THE BURMA ARMY.)

6. IN ALL OF THE ABOVE, THE US PROGRAM HAS SERVED, TO A DEGREE, AS A CATALYST, PROMPTING THE BURMESE TO SHARPEN THEIR FOCUS ON THE PROBLEM AND GIVING THEM SOME OF THE TOOLS WITH WHICH TO COMBAT IT. IT HAS ALSO FOSTERED A UNIQUE (FOR BURMA) BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP IN WHICH THE ASSISTANCE OF A MAJOR WORLD POWER RELATES TO A SENSITIVE DOMESTIC ISSUE (NARCOTICS/INSURGENCY). WE BELIEVE THE BURMESE HAVE COME TO REALIZE THAT IN FACT THERE IS LITTLE POLITICAL COST TO THEM IN DOING BUSINESS IN THIS AREA WITH THE US; EVEN THE PRC OR THE USSR CANNOT COMPLAIN ABOUT ANTI-NARCOTICS  
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EFFORTS. THIS REALIZATION MAY ALSO EXPLAIN WHY THE BURMESE HAVE BEGUN TO PUBLICIZE, AT LEAST TO A LIMITED DEGREE, THEIR ANTI-NARCOTICS SUCCESSES. WE DO NOT WISH TO OVERPLAY THE EXTENT OR INTIMACY OF THE US/GUB RELATIONSHIP HOWEVER; EVEN IF IT WERE IN THE US INTEREST TO PROMOTE AN INTIMATE LINKAGE BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS, THE BURMESE WOULD NOT PERMIT IT. IN FACT, SUCH AN EFFORT WOULD MOST LIKELY PROMPT THEM TO REJECT THE US PROGRAM COMPLETELY. FROM THEIR POINT OF VIEW, THE US ASSISTANCE IS USEFUL BUT NOT CRITICAL; THEY HAVE BEEN FIGHTING INSURGENTS AND TRAFFICKERS FOR MANY YEARS WITH LITTLE OUTSIDE HELP AND THEY WOULD CONTINUE TO DO SO WITHOUT US, ALTHOUGH PERHAPS NOT AS EFFECTIVELY. DUE RESPECT FOR BURMESE SENSITIVITY TO ANY SUGGESTION OF INEQUALITY IN OUR RELATIONSHIP IS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT IN CONNECTION WITH THE GUB RESPONSIBILITY, UNDER OUR AGREEMENT, TO PROVIDE INFORMATION ABOUT THE UTILIZATION OF THE EQUIPMENT SUPPLIED. WHILE US INSISTANCE ON FORMAL, ROUTINE REPORTS WOULD BE RESENTED AND RESISTED BY THE BURMESE, THEY HAVE (BY THEIR STANDARDS) BEEN REMARKABLY OPEN AND FRANK IN VOLUNTEERING INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR EFFORTS AS WE SAW ONCE AGAIN DURING THE RECENT DEA VISIT. THEY UNDERSTAND OUR NEED TO REASONABLY ASSURE THE US GOVERNMENT THAT THE MATERIAL SUPPLIED IS BEING USED FOR THE PURPOSE INTENDED, AND THEY HAVE BEEN WILLING TO BRIEF USG REPRESENTATIVES PERIODICALLY ON THEIR OPERATIONS; THEY UNDERSTAND THIS TO FULFILL SUBSTANTIVELY THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES IN THIS REGARD. WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO CONFIRM INDEPENDENTLY MUCH OF WHAT THEY HAVE TOLD US ABOUT THEIR OPERATIONS AND THE USE OF USG SUPPLIED EQUIPMENT AND, IF ANYTHING, THEY HAVE BEEN MODEST IN THEIR CLAIMS.

7. FOR THE FUTURE, WE BELIEVE THE PROGRAM SHOULD PROCEED AS CURRENTLY PLANNED. DELIVERIES SHOULD BE SPEEDED UP WHERE FEASIBLE TO COINCIDE WITH THE SEASONAL NATURE OF THE NARCOTICS PRO-

DUCTION AND TRADE. THIS IS ESPECIALLY RELEVANT TO THE BACK-PACK  
TRANSCIEVERS, THE NIGHT VISION DEVICES AND AT LEAST A FEW OF THE  
NEXT SIX HELICOPTERS. THERE WILL BE LITTLE OPPORTUNITY FOR THE  
GUB TO MOVE ONCE THE CROP ENDS, THE MONSOON STARTS, AND THE CARA-  
VANS TAPER OFF FOR THE SEASON. THE MULTISPECTRAL PHOTOGRAPHY  
QUESTION SHOULD BE EVALUATED SOON; SHOULD IT SEEM AN EFFECTIVE  
TOOL, WE WOULD HOPE THAT THE PROGRAM COULD BEGIN AT THE END OF  
1976 AS THE NEXT OPIUM CROP BLOOMS. THE FINAL SIX OF THE 18 BELL  
HELICOPTERS SHOULD BE DELIVERED IN TIME TO PARTICIPATE IN THE  
NEXT SEASON'S OPERATIONS ABOUT SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER. THE QUESTION  
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OF A POSSIBLE DEA PERMANENT PRESENCE IN RANGOON SHOULD BE PURSUED  
AS THE OPPORTUNITY PERMITS; IN THE MEANTIME, DEA SHOULD BE PROVIDE  
RELEVANT INFORMATION AVAILABLE ON THE NARCOTICS TRAFFIC IN THE  
REGION, ESPECIALLY AS IT APPLIES TO BURMA (TRAWLER DATA, REFINERY  
LOCATIONS, ETC.) IN ORDER TO DEMONSTRATE ITS PRACTICAL UTILITY TO  
THE GUB, AND SHOULD CONSULT PERIODICALLY WITH THE GUB AND THE  
EMBASSY. WITHIN THE MISSION, USIS SHOULD CONTINUE ITS USEFUL  
INFORMATION PROGRAM ON NARCOTICS INCLUDING, WHERE APPROPRIATE,  
INTERNATIONAL DISSEMINATION OF GUB ANTI-NARCOTICS EFFORTS THROUGH  
USINFO. IN THE LONGER TERM, CONSIDERATION MIGHT ALSO BE GIVEN TO  
POSSIBLE USE OF EXCESS PL-480 CURRENCIES IN SUPPORT OF GOVERNMENT  
DRUG REHABILITATION PROGRAMS. IN GENERAL, WE SHOULD CONTINUE OUR  
RELATIONSHIP ON A BUSINESS LIKE BASIS, PRESS THE BURMESE WHEN AP-  
PROPRIATE FOR ACTION ON SUCH QUESTIONS AS THE SPARE PARTS CONTRACT,  
AND ENGAGE IN PERIODIC HIGHER LEVEL CONSULTATIONS TO REVIEW PRO-  
GRESS AND STRATEGY, E.G., DURING AMBASSADOR VANCE'S VISIT HERE  
NEXT APRIL. WE WILL MONITOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAM  
WITHIN THE LIMITATIONS IMPOSED BY THE BURMESE SYSTEM. HOWEVER,  
IT IS IMPORTANT TO BEAR IN MIND THAT THIS ESSENTIALLY A BURMESE,  
NOT A US, PROGRAM AND WE WILL ALWAYS HAVE TO COUNT ON THEIR EF-  
FORTS, PROMPTED BY THEIR OWN INTERESTS, TO MAKE IT SUCCESSFUL.  
SHOULD THEIR COMMITMENT TO THE PROGRAM FALTER, WE WOULD OF COURSE  
BE PREPARED TO REVIEW, AND IF NEED BE, TERMINATE OUR PARTICIPATION.  
OSBORN  
UNQTE. INGERSOLL

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